

Afro-Cuban Jazz and its Influence on New Orleans Sound

Maestro Daniel Guzman: Cuban National Hero

Question & Answer

Playing at Iris Jazz Club and Cafe Niagara with students from the Esteban Salas Conservatory

Daniel Guzman is a composer widely respected through Cuba. He was a co-facilitator for this trip; he composed music for the big band that we formed with the Cuban conservatory students and local musicians on the last day of our trip.



A Taste of America in Cuba



Q: What was this opportunity and how did it come about?

A: I was invited to join the Latin Jazz Ensemble at the University of Richmond on their annual trip to Cuba. I immediately recognized that this was a once in a lifetime opportunity and with the help of the Center for the Study of the American South, I was able to fulfill this longtime dream of mine.

Q: What was the biggest take-away when it comes to the Afro-Cuban influence on New Orleans Jazz music?

A: The biggest realization for me was that the foundation of Afro-Cuban music, and the roots in which it was founded mirror the beginnings of the New Orleans jazz movement. Over time, however, the two cultures have diverged, focusing on contrasting musical elements: rhythm (Cuba) and harmony (NOLA).

Q: What was the biggest similarity and the biggest contrast between Cuban culture and that of the American South?

A: I noticed that, generally speaking, the Cuban personalities and laid-back, simplistic attitudes towards life reminded me of the American South. Because Cuba remains a Communist nation under the Castro regime, the people are encouraged to follow their dreams and passions as their careers due to the equal pay across all industries. For example, a doctor would not make significantly more than a musician and would become a doctor due to a desire disconnected from financial reason. The same logic does not hold true in America, where money tends to be a driving factor of employment.

Q: What was one notable happy memory and one notable sad memory during the trip to Cuba?

A: The last night of the trip, Maestro Guzman formed a huge band made up of my bandmates, students from Esteban Salas Conservatory, and local professional musicians. We played at a beautiful concert hall called Sala Dolores and the house was packed. The concert was nationally televised on one of Cuba's few television channels; this was a very special moment for me. A sad memory for me was the first time I went to the conservatory to watch the students perform for us. Immediately upon arrival, I was asked to join the students in playing a song but I did not have my saxophone with me. A friend named Miquel generously handed me his saxophone and I looked at the wooden reed on the mouthpiece and it was chipped and worn. I wondered how it was even possible that these students were making sounds out of these instruments. Later, when I had my saxophone with me, I gifted Miquel my last reed and he was ever so grateful. But once I had fixed his reed situation, the other eight saxophonists hovered around me begging for reeds and I had no way of helping them. This was a particularly sad memory of mine from this trip.



My business card sits among hundreds of visitors before me

